



Congressman **Ernest J. Istook, Jr.**

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Contact: Micah Swafford
202-225-2132

Istook, NIH Director Announce \$30 Million for OK Biomedical Research

Oklahoma City, OK – Congressman Ernest Istook (R-OK) and National Institutes of Health (NIH) Director Elias Zerhouni today announced two major grants for Oklahoma medical research totaling almost \$30 million. A \$17.95-million grant was announced for the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center (OUHSC), plus a \$12-million grant for the Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation (OMRF).

These grants will involve researchers and students at 14 institutions around the state. The research will cover a wide variety of medical areas, including various cancers, cystic fibrosis, resistance to antibiotics and the effects of aging.

“This is an important moment in our state’s history as we continue to grow our reputation as a center for biomedical research,” said Istook. **“We are honored that Dr. Zerhouni traveled here to announce the grants and to tour our tremendous research facilities.”**

OUHSC GRANT

The National Center for Research Resources grant for \$17.95 million to OUHSC is the largest NIH grant ever to be awarded to an Oklahoma institution. The five-year grant includes 14 participating Oklahoma educational and research institutions. The grant will fund biomedical research in cancer, microbiology and immunology and neurosciences and will support research facilities needed to conduct biomedical research.

It will also provide opportunities for faculty and students at six primarily undergraduate universities and three community colleges to participate in biomedical research. Dr. Frank Waxman, Professor of Microbiology & Immunology at the OUHSC, is the Principal Investigator.

“Dr. Waxman and the NIH have created a powerful program that will bring valuable resources and opportunities to several of our institutions. The benefits of this research funding will be felt throughout our state and at every level of higher education,” said Dr. Paul G. Risser, the Chancellor of Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education.

University of Oklahoma President David Boren also lauded the grant, **“I am so pleased that this record grant continues a track record of success. Last year the OU Health Science Center was awarded a record \$41.1 million in research grants, a \$10 million increase over 2002. NIH funding is considered the ultimate measure of research quality. We can all be proud that OU has two departments – microbiology and ophthalmology – that rank in the top 10 of NIH funded research nationally.”**

OMRF GRANT

Zerhouni also announced a \$12-million grant for OMRF. Under the five-year grant, which was submitted by OMRF’s Dr. John Harley, four junior OMRF researchers will study the genetics and molecular mechanisms of lupus and other “autoimmune” diseases, where the body turns the weapons of the immune system against itself. **“If Oklahoma wants to establish itself as an important player in the world of medical research, we must develop a critical mass of talented, well-funded scientists,”** said OMRF President Dr. J. Donald Capra. **“This grant helps us do just that.”**

The grant was awarded under the NIH’s Centers of Biomedical Research Excellence (COBRE) program, which gives traditionally underfunded states like Oklahoma the opportunity to enhance research capacity and competitiveness for NIH grants.

“Building research infrastructure allows Oklahoma to compete on a level playing field with the rest of the nation,” said Dr. Judith L. Vaitukaitis, Director of the NIH’s National Center for Research Resources. **“Oklahoma now competes in the biomedical field like it does on the football field.”**

Capra cited Representative Ernest Istook for his role as one of the architects of the COBRE initiative. **“Representative Istook was instrumental in persuading Congress to start this program,”** Capra said. **“Without it, millions of federal dollars that now come to Oklahoma would instead go elsewhere.”**